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Ministry
of Labour

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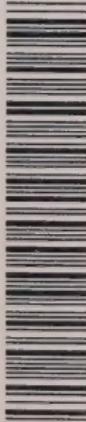
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Ontario
Quality of
Working Life
Centre

The Ontario Quality of Working Life Centre

Organization, Policy and Program



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Program

Policy

Organization

Quality of Working Life

Quality of working life, or QWL, is not an easy thing to define. It is not the kind of thing that can be neatly packaged like a product for sale. It is difficult to define QWL because it has to do with basic values and principles—about people, organizations and society—and values and principles are often difficult to express. QWL focusses on the quality of the relationship between people and their work situation.

It would be wrong to treat quality of working life as if it were something totally new and somewhat mysterious. Many people, especially in management and labour, have long been working to improve wages, hours of work, job security, health and safety, and many other conditions of work. These improvements are all important parts of the quality of working life. However, there are other important, but less tangible aspects to work—things that cannot always be seen, measured, or bargained about. They have to do with giving employees more involvement in and responsibility for their total work environment.

Everyone who has ever worked has a good “gut-level” understanding of the kinds of concerns QWL deals with. People know what turns them on at work—what interests them and at times excites them. People understand the humiliation of being treated like parts of machines, or even worse, like children. And they understand and know what it is like to be respected and treated like capable, responsible adults.

Likewise, managers know when their organizations are running effectively. They know when all the abilities and energies within the organization are being used for the organization and not against it. They understand the frustration of having to spend all of their own energy watching and policing inside the organization so that they are never able to look beyond in order to plan for tomorrow.

Quality of working life is an attempt to deal with these concerns by applying different values and principles to the workplace. These values and principles can be shown in the views about people, organizations and society on which QWL is based.

Within QWL, people are seen as purposeful beings with ideals and important social and psychological needs in relation to work. They are assumed to have the ability and willingness to learn and the need and capability to handle responsibility and autonomy.

Organizations are seen as systems having three interdependent dimensions—an economic, a social (which includes individuals and groups) and a technical dimension. In order to optimize the functioning of the organization as a whole, the three dimensions must be dealt with together so that they will not compete with but rather complement and support each other.

Organization

In addition, organizations are seen as "open" systems because they are constantly in a two-way exchange with their environments. This is of crucial importance in a society that is becoming both more complex and, because of the increasing rate of change and the greater interdependency between all parts of society, less predictable. It means that in order to survive organizations must develop the ability to engage with and actively adapt to a turbulent environment.

In more concrete terms, the application of these principles leads to the development of particular kinds of jobs and organizations. They lead to jobs which enable people to exercise and develop their abilities and fulfill their needs within the workplace. Jobs which give people real opportunities for variety, challenge, responsibility and control and which allow for continuous learning and growth. Jobs where people can work with their fellow workers in a supportive way instead of being isolated from or even pitted against each other. Meaningful jobs that people can talk about with pride. Jobs that are not dead-ended, but lead to desirable futures.

In terms of the organization, these beliefs and principles show the need for flexible organizations which are characterized by continuous learning, both in terms of individual and organizational learning. All parts of the organization must continually be able to learn about and deal with changing relationships—relationships between people and their jobs, between management and workers, between different levels of management, between the union and its members, and between the organization and its environment.

In most cases, these kinds of jobs and organizations will not be built on a basic unit of one person—one job. The requirements of job satisfaction and organizational flexibility are usually better met by some form of relatively self-managing unit where a group of people share the responsibility for a more integrated, complete piece of work.

A final point about QWL is that it is not aimed at doing away with the adversarial system. Collective bargaining is a useful form of conflict resolution. However, QWL is also useful as it offers a way of dealing with win-win situations where management and labour through working together can both gain something, such as job redesign or health and safety. Therefore, collective bargaining and QWL are different kinds of processes which should fit together in a complementary way.

Quality of working life does not do away with the legitimate role of either unions or management. Rather it provides them both with new opportunities to work together to resolve important problems which are extremely difficult to deal with under the traditional system. The end result should be an organization that is better able to meet the needs of both management and labour.

Organization

The Ontario Quality of Working Life Centre was established in December, 1978.

The Centre, the first of its kind in Canada, was created by the Government of Ontario on the recommendation of a joint labour-management Advisory Committee on the Quality of Working Life. The Committee was established in June, 1977 by the Deputy Minister of Labour, Tim Armstrong, Q.C., and has served under his chairmanship since that time.

Advisory Committee

Tim E. Armstrong, Q.C., Deputy Minister of Labour, Chairman

Ralph Barford, President, Valleydene Corporation Limited

Stewart Cooke, Director, District 6, United Steelworkers of America

William Dimma, President, A.E. LePage Limited

Robert Hurlbut, President, General Foods Limited

William Macdonald, Q.C., McMillan, Binch

Clifford Pilkey, President, Ontario Federation of Labour

Robert White, UAW Director for Canada and International Vice President

R. Terrence Mactaggart, Executive Director, Niagara Institute—external advisor to the Committee since its inception

Staff

Hans van Beinum, Executive Director

Jacquie Mansell, Program Co-ordinator

Janine Murray, Program Co-ordinator

Tom Rankin, Program Co-ordinator

Oksana Ostapyk, Secretary

Associates

Norm Halpern, Consultant, Manpower and Utilization, Shell Canada

Murray Lapp, Conciliation Officer, Conciliation & Mediation Services, Ministry of Labour

Stu Sullivan, Ontario Co-ordinator, Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union; Vice President, Ontario Federation of Labour

Eric Trist, Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University and Professor Emeritus, Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania

The QWL Advisory Committee acts as a steering body with respect to the overall policy and program of the Centre.

The staffing and organization of the QWL Centre is composed of two interlocking systems—a small permanent staff and a larger system of Associates and temporary “fellows”.

The staff of the Centre consists of a small group of professionals with experience in a variety of fields such as labour, management, journalism, information sciences, industrial relations, the behavioural sciences, and engineering.

The Centre will expand its system of Associates and “fellows” in order to ensure a broad range of experience and perspectives and to provide flexibility in responding to a wide variety of needs.

The Centre works together with many other organizations and individuals in a variety of settings. Because of the importance of QWL to our whole society, the Centre is building a network of ties with a range of interested organizations both inside and outside Ontario. Special relationships have already been developed with the Niagara Institute, York University, and the International Council for the Quality of Working Life.

Policy

The role of the Centre is to help things happen and to do this by responding to a variety of developments and organizations within different sectors of Ontario. This means that the way in which QWL is developed will be different in each setting. There is no one recipe or format. What will be consistent across all the Centre activities are the values underlying QWL. In other words, the Centre is a facilitating institution. This means that it must have a broad perspective, both in theory and in practice. It also means that both the Centre and its clients must be able and willing to continually learn and grow from their joint efforts.

The aim of the Centre is to contribute to the improvement of the quality of working life in Ontario. It must be understood however that the Centre cannot "bring QWL to Ontario". Through a set of related activities, the Centre will work to help increase both the understanding and practice of QWL and to assist in integrating the QWL concept into our society.

The Centre is not primarily a funding organization. It will actively seek out and become involved in actual quality of working life projects throughout Ontario. The mandate of the Centre includes:

- providing assistance in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of QWL projects;
- providing for the education and training of individuals and organizations in QWL approaches; and
- undertaking information collection and dissemination and research activities, and generally promoting a broadly-based interest in and appreciation of QWL concepts.

QWL is a concept that is relevant to both unionized and non-unionized organizations and the Centre will assist sincere QWL efforts in both settings. It is an explicit policy of the Centre, however, not to be involved with any attempts to use QWL as a tool to avoid or do away with unions. In any setting QWL can only succeed if management and labour are able to recognize areas where joint benefit is possible and are willing to learn to work together as partners in these areas. This means that in a unionized setting, the appropriate union must be actively involved in any QWL program. Above all, actions to improve the quality of working life always need support throughout the whole organization and must be based on the joint involvement and shared responsibility of both management and labour and on the active participation of the workers concerned.

Program

There are five major program areas of the Centre: consultation, field project work, education, information services and research.

1. QWL Consultation.

The staff of the Centre meet, on a daily basis, with many different kinds of organizations in order to introduce and discuss the general QWL concept and to assist the organizations in examining the relevance and meaning of QWL for their own particular situations. These meetings are informal and exploratory and may be either isolated encounters or a first step toward the development of a broader relationship.

2. QWL Field Project Work.

A major role of the QWL Centre is to assist in the development and maintenance of actual programs to improve the quality of working life in Ontario. The Centre will work with interested organizations in activities ranging from the initial examination of values and policies with respect to long-range planning related to QWL, through the design of new systems or the re-design of existing systems, to the monitoring and evaluation of QWL programs.

3. Education.

A wide-ranging education program is essential to the development and diffusion of QWL in Ontario. The education program of the Centre should not only respond to the needs and interests currently expressed in Ontario, but should also help to raise the general level of awareness of new needs and interests. The educational activities offered by the Centre will range from general, introductory sessions through to programs tailor-made to fit the specific needs of one organization, to introduce some particular approach (e.g., participative re-design) or to explore an important area of concern within the QWL field (e.g., evaluation of QWL projects).

4. Information Services.

The Centre is involved in collecting and disseminating information related to the theory and practice of QWL. In order to have access to the widest range of information, the Ontario Centre collaborates with the International Council for the Quality of Working Life. The Centre publishes a newsletter on QWL and provides information in response to specific requests.

5. Research.

Although research is not one of its major activities, the Centre will support and participate in research projects which have important practical implications. In this way, the Centre hopes to contribute to the solution of some of the basic problems which are hindering a sustained development in the QWL field. Some examples of areas needing further research are: the relationship between QWL and the changing role of the different levels of management; the effect of QWL on the role of the union; and the short and long-range effects on the nature of work and on organizations of new technologies such as developments in the field of micro-electronics.

The Centre welcomes requests for further information or assistance.

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